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with the author's cordial request & regards

Franklin H. Littell

THE ANABAPTIST THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS *

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THE ANABAPTIST THEOLOGY OF MISSIONS *

FRANKLIN H. LITTELL

Within the lifetime of many present the far places of the earth have come within the instant range of a single voice. We may not take an easy comfort in the fact, for sometimes the voice is that of a subtly insidious or openly demanding anti-Christian ideology. Nevertheless, the fact remains with its enormous consequence for good or evil. If the children of darkness seem often more alert to use the instant communication and ready personal association which are provided, let us learn our lessons quickly. Technical progress has compressed the entire globe into a small and intensely explosive unit. The most successful engagement of the War of 1812, from an American standpoint, was fought four months after the signing of the peace treaty; at the end of World War II, a single explosion in the air above a Japanese city had immediate repercussions from the quiet farms of Iowa to the little Tartar villages of the Crimea. We live in an apocalyptic age when a premonition of things to come weighs heavily upon all who think and feel.

In our awareness of imminent catastrophe—a consciousness shared with contemporaries of many faiths, and none—we must not forget another great eschatological fact which assumes its true proportion only in terms of the Biblical world-view: *that in our own time Christianity has become the first global religion*. There have been several religions of universal prospect, but only in Christianity

*A paper read at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of Church History, New York, Dec. 30, 1946.

do we see the fulfilment of that time of which the prophets dreamed, when men of all races and tongues, all nations and stations and colors, are gathering about the hill of the Lord. The great vision of the 56th chapter of *Isaiah* and the promise of our Lord in the 12th chapter of *John* are being fulfilled in this day of destiny:

I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself. (John 12:32.)

The tremendous meaning of this present fact should enlighten our historical reviews and enliven our hope for time to come. Neither is this general background remote from our study of a special movement, for the Anabaptists were deeply conscious of the race in history between the end of time and the fulfilment of God's promise to His people.

There is a more immediate reason for providing such a backdrop to a study of the "evangelical Täufer"¹ and their theology of missions. As Dr. Latourette so clearly portrayed it in his presidential address last year, the world expansion of our faith is coming to be more and more a function of the "left wing" of Protestantism. And the map of Christianity shows markedly the signs of a faith less bound by national and racial lines than Christendom of the 16th century, both Roman Catholic and Protestant.

Protestantism is becoming more weighted on the left wing, radical phases of the movement, more ecumenical and less regional, more inclusive and less a sectarian division, and more varied and yet finding a comprehensive unity which permits and even encourages diversity.

From the radical wing come a majority of the missionaries who are propagating Christianity in other lands. This means that the world-wide Protestantism of the decades ahead is probably to depart further from the Christianity of pre-Reformation days than has that of Western Europe and the British Isles. Presumably, the trend will be augmented as the "younger churches" in non-Occidental countries mount in strength.²

¹ Friedmann, Robert, "Conception of the Anabaptists," *Church History* IX (1940) 341-65, 362. "Anabaptist" was a name given by their enemies, to make them liable to the old Roman death penalty for re-baptizers. "They repudiated the name, insisting that infant baptism did not constitute true baptism and that they were not in reality re-baptizers. Their argument was of no avail. The name was so conveniently elastic that it came to be applied to all those who stood out against authoritative state religion." Evans, Austin Patterson, *An Episode in the Struggle for Religious Freedom: The Sectaries of Nuremberg, 1524-1528* (Columbia University Press, N. Y., (1924) 14-15. Roland H. Bainton has introduced a terminology which efficiently groups the Anabaptists and other radical dissenters from dominant Protestantism, and indicates the heterogeneous character of their protest; "The Left Wing of the Reformation," *The Journal of Religion* XXI (1941) 124-34. For precision, it is better to refer to different groupings: Swiss/South German, Hutterite, Dutch.

² Latourette, Kenneth Scott, "A Historian Looks Ahead; The Future of Christianity in the Light of its Past," *Church History* XV (1946), 3-16, 12, 14.

The greatest century of Christian expansion, 1815-1914, was precisely that time when the lay believer in the congregation, rather than the political or economic lord, became the prototype and carrying power of the movement. Rather than continuing to consider that the Christian drama came to an end with the Reformation and that "subsequent events have been akin to curtain calls," whereby "both the scholar and reader are led to the conclusion that in the last four centuries Christianity has been a waning force," we are advised to re-orient our thinking in line with the facts.³

The way in which the Great Century has authenticated the faith and testimony of the free churches is clearly indicated in the record. The latest full figures of money and personnel going to the field from the various agencies are conclusive tribute to a church life with mobility.⁴ We are free to conclude that the maintenance and implementation of a missionary world-view are more a mark of the voluntary religious associations than of the ancient geographical centers of "Christian civilization,"⁵ where congregational life is rendered less mobile by intimate collaboration with political and social centers of power. When we come to this point, it is pertinent to remember that Reformation Europe once had its chance to embrace a pattern of free religious association and rejected it.⁶ Ana-

³ Latourette, Kenneth Scott, "New Perspectives in Church History," *The Journal of Religion* XXI (1941), 432-43, 438.

⁴ Parker, Joseph I., ed., *An Interpretative Statistical Survey of the World Mission of the Christian Church* (International Missionary Council, N.Y., 1938), 83-159.

⁵ In John Baillie's re-thinking of the concept of the Church implied by the idea of a Christian civilization, he abandons the older, coercive pattern. Baillie, John, *What is Christian Civilization?* (Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1945). "Such a recovered civilization would clearly be of the open type which alone I am prepared to defend, and in it the older conscriptive idea of the church's authority would have completely given place to the idea of religious freedom . . ." (p. 41). Significant to our present study is Dr. Baillie's word on Infant Baptism: "The question ultimately turns on the measure in which we believe the Church to have been justified in the principles governing its admission to baptism in the various periods. . . . It has long seemed to me that the element of truth to which too little weight is given by the protesting movements is that contained in the Christian doctrine and practice of the baptism of families The insight enshrined in this doctrine and practice is that the most likely way to bring men to an individual decision for Christ is to nurture them within a Christian community. This community is in the first place the family, and hence the controversy has always revolved around the baptism of infants born to Christian parents. But it is necessary that something of the same principle should be extended also to . . . larger social units. . . . I believe it wrong to hold as of no account the Christianity which pervades the life of a community before it is confirmed in the personal decision of every individual citizen" (pp. 34-35).

⁶ A renowned authority on the Reformation has concluded that the present religious problem in Germany may be due in part to the fact that sectarian Protestantism, which flowered in England and America, was there early destroyed. Bainton, Roland H., *loc. cit.*, 134. It is interesting to note that some contemporary leaders are raising again the old issue of the immobility of the State-church. Pastor Martin Niemöller was recently reported to the effect that he "was raised a Lutheran and did not realize that the traditional Lutheran theology regarding the state was

baptism was suppressed in a welter of blood by Roman Catholic and Protestant authorities, among whom the restraint of Adam of Dietrichstein and Philipp of Hesse, who wanted to convert the radicals rather than kill them, provides only slight relief. Both Rome and dominant Protestantism were committed to the medieval parish pattern,⁷ and determined to suppress the independent congregational and freely conceived evangel of the party of the Restitution.

The doctrine of classical Protestantism in regard to compulsion must be rather quickly summarized. The concept of the Church, in the words of Dr. Bates,

comprehended the entire population of a parish or of a territory, implied infant baptism and coordination with the state system, and tended either toward a rigid absolutism of doctrine and authority . . . or toward a latitudinarian dilution.⁸

It was a continuation of the use of coercion as a method of evangelization, a method in high standing in the Church from the beginning of the fourth century until the emergence of the modern idea of Religious Liberty.

. . . Consider coercion as a method of evangelization, for, as a matter of fact, it has had a large place in the history of Christianity. The church has depended upon the support of secular forces for the defense and extension of the faith throughout most of its history. Under Constantine the church made an alliance with political power which has never been completely dissolved.⁹

The Anabaptist quarrel with the Reformers was basically a conflict of concepts of the Church. It was not, as Social Democrats have claimed, primarily a matter of class alignment and economic interest.¹⁰ Neither was the conflict due to Anabaptist prophetism, revolutionary violence and social disorder, except for certain mar-

wrong. He now believes that the Church must exercise stronger influence on political life, as in England and America, where the church 'acts as the conscience of the state.' As reported in *The Lutheran* XXVIII (September 26, 1945), 52:4.

⁷ The conflict over the parish system is excellently discussed in Ecke, Karl, *Schwenckefeld, Luther und der Gedanke einer apostolischen Reformation* (Berlin, 1911), pp. 70ff.

⁸ Bates, M. Searle, *Religious Liberty: An Inquiry* (N.Y., 1945), 151. On the Reformation era, see pp. 148ff. See also Bainton, Roland H., "The Struggle for Religious Liberty," *Church History* X (1941), 95-124.

⁹ White, Hugh Vernon, *A Theology for Christian Missions* (Chicago, 1937), 4.

¹⁰ In such works as Bax, E. Belfort, *Rise and Fall of the Anabaptists* (Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., London, 1903), Kautsky, Karl, *Communism in Central Europe in the Time of the Reformation* (London, 1897).

ginal groups which the Täufer¹¹ repudiated vigorously and completely.¹²

If this review of issues seems too sharply "participative," we may be reminded that the problems are still with us. Karl Holl, in stating a few years ago the traditional Lutheran position in regard to the relation of Church and State, concluded:

Therein our German interpretation is sharply different from the sect-influenced English-American. For us, cohesion in the State, the furthering and deepening of the national community, count for more than the free movement of individuals.¹³

In the theology of missions itself we have Gustav Warneck's correlative conclusions: although the object of the Christian evangel was originally the whole world.

In the relationships of today there is, however, an obvious limitation to missionary territory, namely that only that nation is the object of a proper mission where the dominant part of mankind is yet conformed outside salvation in Christ, and among whom the Christian Church must first be planted.

. . . But where the Christian territory embraces already a world being Christianized, where there is a School of Christ with an organized minis-

¹¹ Ernst Troeltsch, relying upon Alfred Hegler's *Geist und Schrift bei Sebastian Franck* (Freiburg i. B., 1892) has given somewhat popular circulation to the important distinction between the Anabaptists proper (whom he calls "Täufer") and the prophetic leaders who arose beside them ("spiritualisten"). *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York, 1931), footnote 440, p. 949. See also his "Die Täufer und Spiritualisten," in "Protestantisches Christentum und Kirche in der Neuzeit," in P. Hinneberg's *Geschichte der Christlichen Religion: Die Kultur der Gegenwart* (Leipzig & Berlin, 1922).

¹² In spite of the charges of their enemies, the records show that the main-line Anabaptists repudiated revolution and chiliasm. The Swiss early distinguished between themselves and Thomas Müntzer on this issue; see the letter of Conrad Grebel and associates to Müntzer, September 4, 1524, printed in Neff, Christian, ed., *Gedenkschrift zum 400 jährigen Jubiläum der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten 1525-1925* (Konferenz der Süddeutschen Mennoniten E.V., 1925), (Ludwigshafen am Rh., 1925) 89-99. The Hutterian condemnation is found, among other places, in Beck, Josef, ed., *Die Geschichts-Bücher der Wiedertäufer in Österreich-Ungarn* (Wien, 1883): XLIII *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* (Hist. Comm. Kaiserl. Akad. der Wiss. in Wien), 2^e Abth., p. 73. Also, Zieglschmid, A. J. F., ed., *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* (Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Cayuga Press, Inc., Ithaca, N. Y., 1943) 144. On Menno and the Dutch wing: "... as before God who knows our hearts, we are clear of all their abominable doctrine, uproar, mutiny, blood-shed, plurality of wives and the like abominations. Yea we hate and from all our heart oppose them as acknowledged heresies, as snares to the conscience and deceit, as deception of souls and pestilential doctrine" Quoted in Horsch, John, "Menno Simons' Attitude toward the Anabaptists of Münster," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* X (1936), 55-72, 57. There is ample evidence that the authorities distinguished between the Täufer and the revolutionaries in court, however their polemicists blurred the distinctions in free writing; see Bossert, Gustav, ed., *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer: Herzogtum Württemberg* (Leipzig, 1930), *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* XIII, Numbers 69, 79, 190, 287, etc.

¹³ Holl, Karl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (Tübingen I, 1923), 466.

try—also whether the mission has to have its own missionary or not—there is no longer a missionary object.¹⁴

The Anabaptist church polity and theology of missions assume a proper significance against this background. They developed their apologetic and practice in opposition to what they regarded an unbaptized conformity of the Church to national and political destinies. Their congregations were, as they said, "cut loose from the world." At a time when dominant Protestantism was willing to commit 300 little states to a territorial determination of religion (Augsburg, 1555—"cuius regio, eius religio") the Anabaptists were sending their missionaries wherever they could get a hearing, for The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof (Psalm 24:1)¹⁵

and no land should be forbidden to the proclamation of the Gospel. Krakau, Aachen, Stockholm, and probably Venice and Salonica, would appear on our map of the movement. Wanderings and exile, for individuals and whole families, fill the annals of the movement. And in their defeat they triumphed; they confessed themselves strangers and pilgrims upon the earth. They elaborated a theology of martyrdom.¹⁶ They developed what we might call a "concept of mobility" in analyzing their doctrines of the Church and its world mission.

The Anabaptists and the Great Commission

We have referred to the Anabaptists as the Party of the Restitution to distinguish them from the Reformers. This reference is not for mere convenience: *Their commanding theme was, in fact, the Restitution of the Early Church.*¹⁷ They looked back to the Church before Constantine, and especially to the Church at Jerusalem (*Acts* 2, 4, 5), as the Golden Age of Christian history. They were fascinated by the Eusebian history of the power and triumph

¹⁴ Warneck, G., *Evangelische Missionslehre* (Gotha, 1892-97), 2½ volumes; *Zimmers Handbibliothek der praktischen Theologie* XVI, III, 2, 3.

¹⁵ This proof-text also appears frequently in the Anabaptist writings. See Jakob Hutter's "Brief an den Landeshauptmann in Mähren," in Müller, Lydia, ed., *Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter* (Leipzig, 1938); *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* XX, 163. Pilgram Marpeck criticized the state-church men who wouldn't go unless protected, "and not freely under the cross of Christ"; Horsch, John, *Mennonites in Europe* (Scottsdale, Pa., 1942), 315.

¹⁶ See Ethelbert Stauffer, "The Anabaptist Theology of Missions" in *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* XIX (1945), 179-214, translated from "Martyrertheologie und Täuferbewegung" in *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* LII (1933), 545-98.

¹⁷ On the frequency of the theme "restitutio" see Bainton, Roland H., "Changing Ideas and Ideals in the Sixteenth Century," *The Journal of Modern History* VIII (1936) 417-43, footnote on p. 428.

of the Early Church¹⁸; the growth and victory against incredible odds made a mysterious record, a sign of the secret workings of God. But more mysterious still was the fact that in the very hour of her apparent triumph and well-being the Church fell into disgrace. The inspired Church of the martyrs became the persecuting imperial hierarchy, while the true faith went out into the wilderness.

So after Constantine (it was) above all the communities of heretics which took over and furthered the traditions of the true and precisely for that reason persecuted community of Christ.¹⁹

The Anabaptists rejected the classical periodization of Christian history. The dark condition of the Church was that time from "the Fall" to their own "Restitution" of New Testament doctrine and ordinances.²⁰ Their criticisms of the imperial Roman religion are their criticisms of the Reformers: Church and State were amalgamated, empty formalism and spiritual slackness prevailed, infants were baptized into Christianity before their understanding was mature enough to give the association any content. Luther and Zwingli were condemned as "half-way men," because they did not introduce a thorough-going reformation of church life.

The little group of radicals which broke from Ulrich Zwingli in the fall of 1524 represented a studied effort to restore in full the New Testament life of the Early Church.²¹ It was Zwingli's

¹⁸ Müller, Lydia, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, xxi.

¹⁹ Stauffer, Ethelbert, "Martyrtheologie und Täuferbewegung," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (1933) LII, 545-98, 549.

²⁰ Well discussed in Heyer, Fritz, "Der Kirchenbegriff der Schwärmer," *Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 56 (1939), 156:1-108, pp. 13-15. On the changing periodization of history in the Renaissance and Reformation see Stadelmann, Rudolph, *Vom Geist des ausgehenden Mittelalters* (Halle, 1929); *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* XV, 223. Also, Ferguson, Wallace K., "Humanist Views of the Renaissance," *The American Historical Review* (1939) XLV, reprint, pp. 3f.

²¹ On the point of origin of Anabaptism: If we narrow the term to those leaders and congregations who established a continuing and disciplined church life, Zürich is plainly the point of origin—and was accepted as such by the Swiss/South Germans, Hutterites and Dutch. In the period before the primary sources were available the judgment of the Lutheran polemicists was accepted; the point of departure was, therefore, Wittenberg. Thus, Otte, Joh. Heinrich, *Annales Anabaptistici* (Basel, 1672), 8. He said the Swiss movement stemmed from Müntzer and Nicholas Storch, and from the work of Martin Borchhaus (Cellarius), who went from Wittenberg to join Oecolampadius, serving as Professor of Theology at the University of Basel until his death in 1564 (p. 15). This point of view is still nursed along by those who wish to show that Luther's idea of the origin and significance of "Anabaptism" was sound; see Robert Friedmann on Heinrich Böhmer's Seminar, *loc. cit.*, p. 344. Gottfried Arnold, with habitual liberality, stated that "Anabaptism" had its origins in two different groups: first, Storch, Stuebner, Cellarius, Müntzer; further *Hubmeyern, Mantzern, Grebeln*, Blaurock. *Kirchen- und Ketzer-Historie* (Frankfort am Mayn, 1700), 2 volumes. Volume II; XVI, XXI, 262f. Both are to be strongly distinguished from Münster; p. 264a. During the summer of 1523 Stumpf and Grebel came to Zwingli and Jud and suggested a separate church; the Reformer said that he would have nothing to do with a "Donatist" church and answered with "he who

intention to bring the whole land over to Protestantism, with the visible church order subject to a Christian magistracy.²² Conrad Grebel and his associates found the Reformer's continual deference to the Great Council extremely distasteful, and they broke away to gather a congregation disciplined only according to the New Testament.

No words of the Master were given more serious attention by His Anabaptist followers than His final command:

Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. (*Matthew* 28:18-20).

Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. Whosoever believeth and is baptized, the same shall be saved: but whosoever believeth not, the same shall be damned. (*Mark* 16:15-16).

These words seemed to point up His whole teaching in a glorious program comprehending the world. The pilgrim, familiar figure of the Middle Ages, was transformed in the fiery experience of the Anabaptists into an effective evangelist and martyr. His wandering foot-steps and shedding of blood came to be a determined if not always systematic testimony to the influences of lay missionaries who counted no cost too dear to them who would walk in the steps of the Crucified.

In right faith the Great Commission is fundamental to individual confession and to a true ordering of the community of believers. *The Master meant it to apply to all believers at all times.* The proof-text appears repeatedly in Anabaptist sermons and apologetic writings. The large body of court testimonies and confessions of faith recently made available indicate its central significance, and the various series of questions prepared by the authorities for use in court indicate that they expected it to be of prime importance.²³

is not against us is for us" and the Parable of the Tares. From that point separation was assured between those desiring to restore New Testament life and the Reformation party. Egli, Emil, *Die Züricher Wiedertäufer zur Reformationszeit* (Zürich, 1878), 14-17. Also, No. 692 (April ?, 1525) in Egli, Emil, ed., *Actensammlung zur Geschichte der Zürcher Reformation in den Jahren 1519-1533* (Zürich, 1879). 2 volumes. I, 308-14.

²² Christoffel, R., *Zwingli; or, the Rise of the Reformation in Switzerland* (Edinburgh, 1858), 160-61. Kreutzer, Jakob, "Zwinglis Lehre von der Obrigkeit," *Kirchenrechtliche Abhandlungen* 57 (1909), 1-100, p. 64.

²³ Egli, Emil, ed., *op. cit.*, No. 674 (March 16-25, 1525), I, 299: one testified that he slept at home during the services; and besides he had read in his testament "who believes and is baptized. . . ." See also No. 1631 (Dec. 26, 1529), I, 692: here the Great Commission (Mk 16) and the Ban (Mt 18) are linked together as basic ordinances. "Rechenschaft und bekanntnis des glaubens . . ." (Trieste, 1539)

Our faith stands on nothing other than the command of Christ (*Mat.* 28, *Marc.* 16). For Christ didn't say to his disciples: Go forth and celebrate the Mass, but go forth and preach the Gospel.²⁴

The very order of the words convey his intent:

Firstly, Christ said, go forth into the whole world, preach the Gospel to every creature. *Secondly*, he said, whosoever believes, *thirdly*—and is baptized, the same shall be saved. This order must be maintained if a true Christianity is to be erected²⁵

The evangel comes first, then faith, and finally baptism; a failure to respect this Scriptural sequence indicates a lack of respect for the Mind of Christ for His disciples:

Go forth into the whole world and preach the Gospel; whosoever believes and is baptized the same shall be saved; for the preaching of God's word shall go before and not after the baptism, etc²⁶

Baptism of those in whom faith is stirred by the preaching of the Gospel is the logical culmination of the mandate which begins, "Go forth. . . ."

Although the polemic of the party of the Reformers was aimed usually at weak spots in the radicals' armor, the authorities were evidently well aware of the Anabaptist missionary world-view. Justus Menius knew their emphasis and repeated it before attempting refutation: they teach that

no one shall be baptized before he learns and believes because Christ said at the last of Matthew go forth, teach all peoples, and baptize them. *Item*,

stressed *Mark* 16; Müller, Lydia, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, 193. When Hanns Schlaffer was called up before the authorities at Schwatz in 1528, he answered them on *Matthew* 28, *Mark* 16; van Braght, *A Martyrology of the Churches of Christ Commonly Called Baptist* (Hanserd Knollys Society, London, 1850-53), I, 50. The central authority in Hübmaier's "Von dem christl. Tauff der Gläubigen" is *Matthew* 28:29; see Sachsse, Carl, *D. Balthasar Hubmaier als Theologe* (Berlin, 1914), *Neuen Studien zur Geschichte der Theologie und der Kirche*, XX, 19-20. Schornbaum, Karl, *ed.*, *Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer: Markgraftum Brandenburg* (Leipzig, 1934), *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte*, XVI:2, No. 260 (May, 1531), pp. 236-37: Questions prepared for the Windesheim *Wiedertäufer* indicate the authorities' expectation of testimony based on the Great Commission and the *Acts*. Zeiglschmid, A. J. F., *ed.*, *op. cit.*, 31.

²⁴ Beck, Josef, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, 62, 64 (Hanns Schlaffer).

²⁵ Müller, Lydia, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, 15 (Hans Hut), 92 (Hanns Schlaffer), 112. B. Hübmaier wrote to the authorities that he knew of no other order but preach, believe, baptize; Egli, Emil, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, I, 449. When at St. Gall Uolimann was summoned before the Council, April 25, 1525, for going on his own authority with Baptism and the Supper, he said the original order was teaching, believing, baptizing; and this lasted to the time of Tertullian and Cyprian when they began to baptize sick children. See Heath, Richard, *Anabaptism from its Rise at Zwickau to its Fall at Münster* (London, 1895), 39. (Contains interesting material in spite of an erroneous thesis.)

²⁶ Schornbaum, Karl, *ed.*, *op. cit.*, No. 44 (Sept. 20, 1527), p. 34 (Hans Spitelmaier).

the last of Mark: Whosoever believes and is baptized the same shall be saved. But children cannot be taught anything/therefore they also can not believe/therefore man shall also not baptize them.²⁷

Menius denies flatly that the Great Commission was intended for Christians after the time of the Apostles.

... the Apostles not only ordered themselves but also through their disciples and in their writings, teachings, and examples left after them how it should be done with the calling of the Servants of the Gospel in the Church; namely that the Servant of the Gospel does not travel here and there in the land in one church today and another tomorrow, preaching one thing in one and another in the other. But one servant serves with true industry his assigned church and remains with it, leaving other churches to peace and tranquillity. Thereby each church has its own constituted servant and avoids and excludes strange, unlicensed landcombers. . . .²⁸

Heinrich Bullinger was also bitterly critical of those who subverted the social order by leaving their callings to wander in the land.²⁹ The Reformers could not understand the apparent instability of one who . . . had a wife and four children, no home place and was the citizen of no city,³⁰ for they were concerned to carry over from medieval civilization those relationships which made for a stable society. But to the religious radical, driven by persecution and the Lord's Commission, these were "worldly concerns." We can hear him say to the authorities of Church and State who tried to hold him fast in his "natural" responsibilities:

I no longer live but Christ in me and the world crucified in me.³¹

A Missionary Community

Although Believers' Baptism (*Spättaufe, Erwachsenentaufe*) was not the heart of the argument, still it became a ready mark of those who stood firm in the faith at the cost of persecution. "Standing still" was a sign of cowardice, in the opinion of the chief leaders of the Anabaptist movement.³² The Great Commission was the

²⁷ Menius, Justus, *Von dem Geist der Widerteuffer* (Wittenberg, 1544), folio Lijj.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no pagination.

²⁹ Bullinger, Heinrich, *Der Widerteuffern ursprung/fürgang/secten/wäsen/usw.* (Zurich, 1560), 148b.

³⁰ An Anabaptist examined by Joh. Brenz; Bossert, Gustav, ed., *op. cit.*, No. 169 (April 9, 1557), p. 146.

³¹ Müller, Lydia, ed., *op. cit.*, 214 (Ulrich Stadler).

³² The gathering of a community with New Testament discipline (spiritual government according to *Matthew* 18:15-17) was the ground of the Anabaptists' running controversy with Schwenckfeld. Pilgram Marpeck and his associates held to a vigorously covenantal teaching, and repudiated Schwenckfeld for refusing to use believers' baptism which the latter termed a new captivity of the conscience. He was moved to study the question by Menius' book and urged suspension of Infant Baptism. On the other hand he opposed the Anabaptists' insistence upon becoming

stock argument for the use of the sign. The Article on Baptism in the Five Articles (c.1547), a Confession of Faith and second most important document of the Hutterians, found its cornerstone in *Matthew* 28 and *Mark* 16.³³ Hans Hut, foremost missionary of the South German Brethren, used a standard formula as he baptized hundreds: he told them to obey the commandments, preach the Gospel, and baptize others in the Great Commission.³⁴

The word which stands in *Mark* 16 had moved him to preach, namely, that preaching was first, afterwards faith, and thirdly baptism. And man must let the word of the Lord stand. (He is) not to do anything apart from it, (and) also shall depart neither to the right nor to the left, according to the last of *Matthew* that one shall first teach and afterwards baptize.³⁵

The evidence from other groups and leaders is of a kind. The freely spoken evangel was the moving force in a complete re-working of the Old Man, whose crucifixion and re-birth in faith were sealed by the sign. Only those of mature judgment, passed through a crucial and transforming adult experience, could rightly be let through the door into a responsible covenantal relation to God and his fellows, for the strenuous life of a Christian wanderer and martyr is no child's play (*kein kinderspiel!*).³⁶

The Anabaptist missionary impulse was crippled by persecution among the South Germans and Swiss and by prosperity among the Dutch Mennonites. Only two or three of the famous Martyr Synod which met in Hans Denck's house in Augsburg, August 20, 1527,

Children of God by faith baptism. The Spirit moveth where it listeth . . . (*John* 3:8). "Von dem Kindertauf," in *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum* (ed. Johnson, Elmer E. S., for the Bd. of Publ. of the Schwenckfelder Church and Hartford Theological Seminary, 1907ff.), III, 812-24, 816. Also, X, 932. The Anabaptists replied that he would not have been satisfied with Christ's Church if contemporary with Him and that Believers' Baptism and the Ban were biblical ordinances given by Christ for the maintenance of His Church. Loserth, Johann, "Studien zu Pilgram Marpeck" in Neff, Christian, ed., *op. cit.*, 134f, 150. See VII CS 161ff for bibliography on the relation of the Anabaptists and Schwenckfeld.

³³ Zieglschmid, A. J. F., ed., *op. cit.*, 269ff. See also p. 60: Baptism stands on *Mark* 16, *Matthew* 28 (Hans Schlaffer, 1528). And on pp. 250f, a statement by Gabrielites who joined the Hutterians in 1545 begins with Baptism, based on *Matthew* 28 and *Mark* 16. See Müller, Lydia, ed., *op. cit.*, 236f. At an examination of various people at Erlangen, 1527, Hans Ritter the Nodler said: 1) the Lord commanded "go ye . . ."; 2) man must submit under God as animals under man; 3) they went to flowing water, filled a hat and poured; Schornbaum, Karl, ed., *op. cit.*, No. 16. p. 16. In the Confession of an Anabaptist at Antwerp, 1551: "Question. 'What do you hold concerning infant baptism?' Answer. 'I consider it nothing else than a human institution.' Qu. 'By what then will you prove, or establish your baptism.' Ans. 'By *Mark* xvi.'" van Braght, T. J., *op. cit.*, I, 436-37.

³⁴ Schornbaum, Karl, ed., *op. cit.*, No. 353 (April 27, 1534), 338.

³⁵ "Urgicht . . . 16. September 1527," in Meyer, Christian, "Zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer in Oberschwaben: 1. Die Anfänge des Wiedertäuferthums in Augsburg," *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereins für Schwaben und Neuburg* (1874) I, 207-56, 223.

³⁶ So one writer concluded, referring to the excellent example of the Master, baptized by John in his 30th year; Müller, Lydia, ed., *op. cit.*, 93.

lived to see the fifth year of the movement. (This meeting could as well be termed a "Missionary Synod" as "Martyr Synod," for the outstanding leaders of that wing of the movement were all there and divided the land for systematic cultivation.)³⁷ But among the Hutterites, where some provisional peace was enjoyed for a season, a highly ordered and well-supported missionary work was maintained. Their rich epistolary literature, in which we see again the faith and style of communication of the Early Church, has been analyzed by Dr. Robert Friedmann. He has listed about four hundred epistles and similar writings, composed by seventy-five to eighty writers.

Of these writers, about half (that is forty) were martyrs, having been executed by fire or sword. Most of them were ministers of the word (*Diener des Wortes*) or missionaries (*Sendboten*).³⁸

The richest period of all was the so-called Golden Era under the Elder (*Vorsteher*) Peter Walpot, 1565 to 1578, just before the Jesuit reaction scattered the faithful in Moravia and drove a small remnant to a new frontier home. Some of the writings are naively winsome, and all indicate a lay faith of very high order.

The Anabaptists looked for the triumph of the true faith by the Pauline missions-method, and they knew the ground of their opposition to the establishment. The brother, Veith Uhrmacher, many years in a Salzburg dungeon "for the sake of God's truth," reported his conversation with Roman Catholic priests who came to convert him. They said,

Saint Peter says, "be willing to give account." Upon which I said, "What shall I say? You are prosecutor and judge all in one person. What you cannot decide, constables and hangmen have to carry out in your place. You tell it to the prince, the prince tells it to the judge, the judge tells it to the constable, and the constable tells it to the hangman. He then finishes up the case. He is your high priest, he helps you to win the field!"³⁹

The proof that the so-called Christians (*vermainten Christen*) were not truly Christian was in their use of compulsion in matters of faith.⁴⁰

The true Christian is fighting a different battle with different weapons from those of the world.

³⁷ See article by Hege, "Augsburger Täufergemeinde," in *Mennonitisches Lexikon* I (ed. Hege, Christian and Neff, Christian), Frankfurt und Weierhof (Pfalz), 1913—, I, 92-96; also Hege's article "Martyrersynode," *Mennonitisches Lexikon* III (1938), 53-56.

³⁸ Friedmann, Robert, "The Epistles of the Hutterian Brethren," *M. Q. Review* XX (1946) 147-77, 153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 160-61.

⁴⁰ Zieglschmid, A. J. F., ed., *op. cit.*, 183.

The angel with the sword in the mouth indicates that for us Christians also the sword does not belong in the hand, but in the mouth—namely, the sword of the Spirit.⁴¹

The martyr church is able to establish its place in history in terms of its suffering.⁴² It is the wolf which drives others: the sheep is a poor defenseless beast. The Bible, which tells of the Good Shepherd, frequently calls His flock "the sheep."

By sheep Christians alone were meant. A sheep is a meek, weaponless, submissive beast, that has no other defence for itself than to run as long as it can and may. And it resembles the governance of the sword not at all, as little as a sheep resembles a wolf or lion.⁴³

The Anabaptists made much of the struggle and suffering in *Hebrews* 11:33-38, and the analogy between baptism and death ("blood-baptism"), in restoring the eschatology and martyr theology of the Early Church.

And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water and the blood: and these three agree in one. (*I John* 5:8)⁴⁴

Martyrdom was their carrying power, their triumph beyond obvious defeat, their final long pilgrimage free from the world and its particularisms.

Accepted by the common people but savagely persecuted by the authorities, driven to death and exile by the enemies of the Restitution of New Testament church life, the Anabaptists did not lose their faith that the Master was gathering His people from the far corners of the earth and that in His own good time God would give them the kingdom.

⁴¹ In the Five Articles (c. 1547); Müller, Lydia, *ed., op. cit.*, 252.

⁴² On the relation of their missionary power to willingness to suffer, note Heyer, Fritz, *loc. cit.*, 20-21.

⁴³ Müller, Lydia, *ed., op. cit.*, 249.

⁴⁴ On the three-fold baptism see Leonhard Schiemer in Müller, Lydia, *ed., op. cit.*, 77i.

